

**Defining Nostalgia: The need for an empirical study**

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The term nostalgia was first introduced in 1688 by Johannes Hofer as a concept of homesickness. Since the 1700s, the fields of psychology and sociology have transformed the meaning of nostalgia, inspiring many disciplines to empirically explore the term, especially as it relates to consumer behavior. Holak and Halena (1992, 1998) have explored the themes and emotion components involved in the nostalgic experience. Holbrook (1993) has investigated patterns of consumption preferences as they relate to age and Pascal, Sprott, and Muehling (2002) have explored the influences of evoked nostalgia on consumers' responses to advertising.

Although these noted advancements have been made in relation to nostalgia, the definition of nostalgia remains controversial. Davis (1979), a sociologist describes nostalgia as an "intensely private and subjective"; yearning for the past", which is a "personally experienced past"(p.7-8). Holbrook and Schindler (2003) define nostalgia as "a preference towards experiences with objects that were more common when one was younger"(p. 108). Holak and Havlena (1998) suggest nostalgia is "a positively valenced complex feeling, emotion, or mood produced by reflection on things associated with the past"(p. 218). These definitions encapsulate various attributes of nostalgia, but the fundamental element of all existing nostalgic definitions is whether or not one has to live an experience in order to be nostalgic.

The discrepancy of whether or not one has to personally experience the past in order to be nostalgic has driven much controversy. Davis (1977) believes the conclusion to the disagreement is "something obvious", that in order to be nostalgic, one has to experience the past (p. 416). Other scholars expand their definitions to follow the opposing doctrine, where experiences can be learned (Holak and Havlena, 1998; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). The discrepancy between the definitions is too valuable to dismiss and the lack of clarity places limitations on the results of previous studies and any future studies.

It is imperative to clarify the definition of nostalgia to determine if experiencing the past is necessary or not in order for one to be nostalgic, resulting in the need for an empirical study to investigate the discrepancy. It is hypothesized that in order for one to be nostalgic, one does not have to personally live the event, rather one can learn about the event through different mediums (i.e. word of mouth, internet, and encyclopedias).

A theoretical model to test the hypothesis could include a panel of eight experts from the field of sport management. The panel would review several pairs of images that depict items relating to a sporting event. The experts would score each item on a seven point Likert-scale based on the experts' perception of the fit of the items as they relate to the sporting event. The experts would also rate the images based on the likelihood that the sample population would provide an equal representation of the participants who would have experienced and who would not have experience the event. The pair of nostalgia items with the highest average score on the two components would be used in the study.

Data could be collected from a convenience sample of university students who are enrolled in educational activity classes. The participants would be asked to answer a question regarding their experience with the event and then they would view the selected items of nostalgia. Following the viewing of the images, respondents would be asked to complete Pascal, Sprott, and Muehling's (2002) Evoked Nostalgia Scale (NOST).

Results from the study would clarify the fundamental discrepancies with the definition of nostalgia. The outcome of the study would benefit many disciplines and allow for continued development to understand the attributes and influences of nostalgia. The field of sport management would be able to utilize the results to investigate the effects of nostalgia on consumer behavior and marketing.